

February 13, 2006

Dear FCC,

I am writing in response to the FCC's ruling on "Video Franchising." I was perplexed and disturbed to hear about the FCC consideration to do away with local video franchising agreements. I am very concerned with the effects of this legislation and the impact it would have on my community. I am a resident of Brooklyn, New York. I have been a producer and viewer of Brooklyn Cable Access Television and Manhattan Neighborhood Network for the past six years. I am a long time staff member at Paper Tiger Television- a celebrated arts and documentary program which has aired on public access television for more than 20 years.

The public is watching, learning and creating dialogue through the use of Public Access channels every day around our country. As a strong believer in the potential for a democratic nation and the right of the people to communicate freely – although they are not nearly enough for Americans (corporations can do MUCH more,) Public Access Channels are a vital outlet for so many communities here in New York.

Through our local Public Access channels, we are able to reach members of our communities, share stories, victories and struggles with one another. We are able to become exposed to other cultures and viewpoints which go underrepresented in mainstream media. PEG channels are used to air educational, social issue and multi lingual programming created by and for the people most whom most often are disenfranchised by the often racist, classist and homophobic corporations whom have control over virtually every single medium through which we receive our information. This legislation would effectively cut off the American public's ability to communicate freely, in their own voices, about the issues that matter most to them... something that is so vital to ensuring a healthy democracy.

As staff of a non-profit who works to teach community members how to make media in order to strengthen their campaigns for justice, the access centers I work with in New York City and across the country provide training, facilities and the tools necessary for making the voices of the disenfranchised heard. Paper Tiger Television often airs programming created by community members about local social issues affecting them. Frequently after a broadcast of a new show, my office receives phone calls from viewers who want to learn more about the issue, want to know how to get involved to help and want to thank us for letting them know that they are not alone in their struggle. Public access has great power and potential to reach people, to provide a platform for democratic debate, to broaden cultural understandings and build tolerance amongst the diverse communities of New York City. By buying and selling public airwaves, you are doing the American people a huge disservice. This marketplace of ideas and experience is a vital tool and cannot be threatened, compromised or sold to protect the interests of corporations.

Public interest should be CENTRAL to Media Policy. Americans are not only consumers in the media landscape we are active participants and decision makers. Please vote to protect Public Access and allocate further funding to strengthen local municipal television, to open and free internet access and radio airwaves. Please help every American have the opportunity to fully participate in our Democracy. We are watching and we will be vigilant. Communication is a right.

Sincerely,

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